

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEA-10 IO-15 CCO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1426

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8306

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NI, US, XF

SUBJECT: GOWON APPEALS TO US FOR ME RESTRAINT

SUMMARY: NIGERIAN HEAD OF STATE YAKUBU GOWON APPEALS TO THE UNITED STATES NOT TO INTRODUCE ARMS INTO THE CURRENT MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. PRESSURES GROW FOR FMG TO BREAK WITH ISRAEL. END SUMMARY

1. AT 0900 GMT OCTOBER 13 I CALLED ON GENERAL GOWON IN DODAN BARRACKS AT HIS REQUEST. THE GENERAL BEGAN THE SUBSTANTIVE PART OF THE ONE-HOUR CONVERSATION BY STATING NIGERIA "GREATLY DISTURBED" BY "RAPIDLY DETERIORATING EVENTS IN MIDDLE EAST." HE WISHED TALK WITH ME, AND LATER WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR, BECAUSE IN HIS JUDGMENT OUR COUNTRIES HOLD "KEY" TO LASTING SETTLEMENT, WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN GAINED LONG AGO EXCEPT FOR "ISRAELI INTRANSIGENCE." HIS BACKGROUND ANALYSIS OF CONTINUING MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM IS THAT ISRAEL AS "THE GENEROUS CONQUEROR OF 1967" SHOULD HAVE YIELDED "SOME TERRITORY" IN ORDER ASSURE AN ENDURING PEACE, AS HE EXPLAINED TO MRS. MEIR WHEN HE WAS IN TEL AVIV. THE PRINCIPAL ARABLS, GOING BACK TO NASSER'S LAST DAYS AND CONFIRMED TO GOWON BY SADAT AS RECENTLY AS THE ALGIERS
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NAC, ARE NOT DETERMINED TO DRIVE ISRAEL INTO THE SEAS.

STILL, ISRAEL HAS "ARROGANTLY DEFIED WORLD OPINION" BY HOLDING EVERY SQUARE INCH OF TERRITORY GAINED WHEN SHE STRUCK FIRST IN 1967.

2. THE GENERAL RECOGNIZES THAT THE USG, HAVING SUPERIOR INFORMATION TO HIS, MAY NOT AGREE WITH HIS, AND OTHER AFRICANS', BACKGROUND ANALYSIS, BUT HE IS NOT TROUBLED BY ANALYTICAL DIFFERENCES AND, INDEED, IS ALWAYS READY TO "HAVE MY EDUCATION STRENGTHENED". THAT WHICH DISTURBS HIM AND WHICH IS THE MAIN REASON FOR CALLING ME IS THE REPORTED (ON THE VOA, HE SAID) INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL AMERICAN ARMS "INTO THE ALREADY FORMIDABLE ISRAELI WAR MACHINE." HE HOPES THAT THE REPORTS ARE FALSE BUT MUST RELY ON THEM PENDING THE REVELATION OF OTHER FACTS. AS A FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES, HE URGES THAT WE NOT MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR ISRAEL TO INFLICT DEVASTATION ON AN OAU MEMBER, EGYPT.

3. DURING THE "TRYING TIMES" PRIOR TO BEGINNING OF WAR AND IN SPITE OF THE PRESSURES ON HIM IN NEW YORK AND AFTER HIS RETURN, NIGERIA HAS ATTEMPTED PURSUE A POLICY OF "EVENHANDED STATEMANSHIP," OFFERING ISRAEL EVERY BENEFIT OF EVERY DOUBT. HOWEVER, THE EVENTS OF THE NEXT FEW DAYS WILL DETERMINE WHETHER NIGERIA MUST "RELUCTANTLY REVIEW" HER RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL.

4. HE HOPED THAT I WOULD URGENTLY INFORM MY GOVERNMENT OF HIS VIEWS AND REQUEST FROM THE USG ANY INFORMATION, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING OUR FUTURE ARMS POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THAT WILL ASSIST HIM IN DETERMINING THE COURSE THAT THE FMG SHOULD FOLLOW "IN THESE DIFFICULT TIMES."

5. I TOLD THE GENERAL THAT, OF COURSE, I WOULD FORWARD HIS REMARKS TO WASHINGTON. MEANWHILE, I HOPED THAT HE HAD BEEN CAREFULLY FOLLOWING THE REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY CONCERNING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. HE SAID HE HAD AND WOULD CONTINUE TO DO SO WITH INTEREST. I THEN PARAPHRASED APPROPRIATE SECTIONS OF THE SECRETARY'S OCTOBER 12 PRESS CONFERENCE: THE GREAT NEED FOR AND THE CEASELESS EFFORTS OF THE USG TO SECURE A CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES; THE NATIONAL INTEREST THAT WE HAVE IN GAINING A PERMANENT SETTLEMENT IN THE ME, AN INTEREST WHICH HAS BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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INTENSIFIED BY THE MILITARY CONFLICT; THE FACT THAT WE OBVIOUSLY MORE THAN NIGERIA STAND TO BE DRAWN INTO THE STRUGGLE, HENCE OUR COMPELLING HOPE FOR AN ENDURING PEACE; AND THE COMPLEXITIES CREATED BY OUR RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND THOSE OF THE SOVIETS WITH THE ARABS, WHICH I HOPED HE APPRECIATED WOULD NOT BE DROPPED DURING THE CRISIS. FINALLY, I POINTED OUT THAT SIMPLE ACTS IN A COMPLEX SITUATION WILL NOT BE CONDUCIVE TO ACHIEVING DESIRED RESULTS; NEITHER WILL

SLOGANS AND POINTLESS GESTURES.

6. GOWON THEN DENIED THAT THE USG'S REFRAINING FROM SHIPPING ARMS TO ISRAEL IS EITHER A SIMPLE ACT OR A GESTURE, BUT IT IS THE "KEY." WE HAD STOPPED ARMS BEFORE, IN PAKISTAN AND IN NIGERIA DURING "OUR CRISIS," AND THE FMG APPRECIATED AND RESPECTED OUR ACTION IN EACH CASE, EVEN IF IT DID NOT AGREE. IN THE CONGO WE HAD GONE IN THE OTHER DIRECTION, SHOWING THAT WE HAVE FLEXIBILITY. HE SINCERELY HOPES THAT WE WILL BE EQUALLY FLEXIBLE IN THE PRESENT WAR AND NOT "CONTRIBUTE MUNITIONS."

7. I REPLIED THAT I UNDERSTOOD HIS MESSAGE AND HAD NO DESIRE TO PROLONG HIS BUSY DAY, BUT I HOPED THAT HE REALIZED THE CONFLICTS HE CITED WERE NOT ANALAGOUS TO THE PRESENT ME WAR. FORCING AN ANALOGY IS ILLUSTRATIVE OF WHAT I MEANT BY TURNING COMPLEXITIES INTO SIMPLICITIES. FINALLY, I ASKED WHETHER HE WAS AWARE OF THE SOURCE OF THE UNDOUBTED ARMS DELIVERIES INTO THE ME TODAY.

8. HE SAID HE REALIZES THAT PAKISTAN, NIGERIA, AND THE CONGO ARE NOT EXACT "COMPARISONS," BUT "THEY ARE CLOSE ENOUGH FOR ME TO MAKE MY POINT." AS FOR THE "OTHER" ARMS GOING INTO THE CONFLICT, HE WOULD DISCUSS WITH THE SOVIETS.

9. COMMENT: GOWON TODAY, AS USUAL, WAS OPERATING AS THE LEADER WITH FERVENTLY HELD CONVICTIONS AND NOT AS A LOGICIAN, BUT GIVEN THE PRESSURES TO BREAK WITH ISRAEL, HE HAS NO OTHER CHOICE AND PROBABLY NO OTHER INCLINATION AT THIS POINT. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO KNOW WHAT HE TOLD THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR, WHO WAS AWAITING HIS TURN AS I DEPARTED BUT I TOLD GOWON FLATLY THAT HIS APPEAL TO ME ABOUT ARMS SHOULD, IN LIGHT OF THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE, BE URGENTLY REPEATED TO MY SOVIET CONFIDENTIAL

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COLLEAGUE. AS I EXPECTED, HE MADE NO PROMISE AND SIGNALLED NO INTENTION.

10. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE FMG IS COMMITTED TO THE ARAB CAUSE IN THE PRESENT CONFLICT (SEPTTEL), BUT THERE IS ALSO NO QUESTION THAT GOWON PERSONALLY IS COMMITTED TO WHAT HE CALLS "LASTING PEACE" AND "JUST BORDERS" FOR ISRAEL. IN THIS CIRCUMSTANCE, HIS OFFICIAL STANCE TOWARD ISRAEL, DESPITE THE PRESSURES, HAS BEEN REMARKABLE AND A SOMEWHAT UNAFRICAN CONTRIBUTION TO ORDER. THERE ARE SIGNS (SEPTTEL) THAT HE MAY BE PREPARING TO JOIN OTHER OAU MEMBERS IN BREAKING RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL; THE PRESSURES HAVE NEVER BEEN GREATER. I RECOMMEND THAT WE NOT AWAIT THIS TURN WITHOUT MAKING SOME ADDITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OR RESPONSE TO HIS APPEAL.
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